

Nancy Peterson
Testimony 9/9/04 CPR Commission Meeting

I applaud the California Performance Review's recommendation to "expand opportunities for volunteerism." As noted in the CPR report, "California has a rich history of volunteerism." Different motivations, needs and opportunities trigger Californians to serve their communities in different ways at different points in their life. The State has and should continue to advance the ethic and practice of service and volunteerism through a variety of roles, regulations, and resources.

When well-designed and implemented, service and volunteerism provide a win-win for California – for the Californians who serve and for those whose needs are met through the service of individuals. Not only is meaningful service accomplished, but the server also gains:

- Community volunteers develop a stronger stake in and understanding of their communities.
- Students who participate in service-learning and community service make academic gains and take first steps toward a lifetime of civic participation.
- Young adults who join a conservation or service corps develop work, life and education skills.
- Mentors benefit from two-way relationships with the young people they mentor.
- Older adults who participate in service programs demonstrate health gains and make social connections.
- Disaster response volunteers overcome their sense of helplessness by taking action when they are faced by circumstances that seem beyond their control.

However, not all volunteer and service experiences are successful. Not all people who want to volunteer can find opportunities that suit or motivate them. Not all community needs that could be taken on through volunteerism are met. Successful volunteering is not easy and it's not free.

Public/Private Ventures' landmark mentoring study¹ estimated the cost of a "successful mentoring match" as \$1,000. A later P/PV study² on a broader range of volunteer activities concluded that the necessary supports cost approximately \$300/volunteer. This second study pointed to three ingredients that require financial commitment: 1) screening to ensure the right fit between the potential volunteer and the volunteer role; 2) training to make sure volunteers are well-prepared and have the skills or knowledge to take on their roles, and 3) ongoing management and support.

Another study³ by the Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service, confirmed these costs for high quality programs, but went one step farther to say that "21st century volunteers will cost more because of changing demographics and expectations among those who volunteer" and the need to "invest more time and money in the recruitment, training and retention" than in the past. A recent Urban Institute study⁴ also concluded that charities and congregations are not always fully equipped to make the most of their volunteers. They are often unable to dedicate adequate staff time to volunteer management.

The State can help local communities and organizations effectively engage more Californians in volunteering by strengthening state leadership, addressing several key policy and structural issues that affect serving and volunteering in California, and consolidating state-level supports and systems. The CPR's six recommendations (ETV28-33) related to expanding volunteerism provide some good steps in this direction:

1. Remove Statutory Impediments to Volunteerism (ETV28)

I support this recommendation and understand that significant steps toward resolution of this issue were taken with the Governor's recent signing of AB2690. Additionally, I encourage the State to look beyond this prevailing wage issue to address other impediments to volunteerism that are consistently raised by service and volunteer program practitioners and participants at the local level. In particular, the costs and complexity of background checks affect recruitment and retention of many volunteers who work with children and adults in care settings. While there are important reasons for these requirements, the state could take steps to enhance local access to easy and low-costs fingerprinting, facilitate background checks and health screening, and address other risk management issues.

2. Restructure the Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism (ETV29)

I support this overall recommendation to build a stronger state office by consolidating state-level volunteer and service functions and activities.

A. Rename and restructure the former Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism (GO SERV). This past month, the first steps were taken to better communicate GO SERV's purpose and broaden its scope when it was renamed and reconstituted as the California Service Corps through Executive Order S-14-04. I believe that there is a real opportunity to make this new California Service Corps a statewide focal point for service and volunteerism in California.

Originally established ten years ago to meet a federal requirement for the administration of AmeriCorps funds, this state-level entity has not only implemented AmeriCorps, but has also convened and worked closely with representatives of statewide nonprofit associations and organizations and public agencies that support service and volunteerism among their constituents and networks. Because service and volunteerism must ultimately be designed and delivered at the community level, the California Service Corps should continue to link closely with local, regional and statewide groups to ensure that its work complements their work and helps them connect Californians who want to serve to high quality service and volunteer opportunities that match their skills, interests, availability and life stage.

B. Transfer programs from other agencies to the new California Service Corps. In general, I believe that it makes sense to consolidate the state's service and volunteer-related activities within the new California Service Corps. Most of these programs were

developed prior to the existence of the California Service Corps (and its predecessors) within different state agencies. Transferring them to the California Service Corps will more closely align them with the State's service and volunteer goals; however, in most cases, they will also need to continue to have a strong working relationship with the agency or programs that founded them. Additionally, most of the programs that are recommended for this consolidation have experienced significant reductions (or complete elimination) in funding over the past few years. As such, I would recommend caution around transferring programs without the financial resources to carry them out.

- Mentoring Programs: The state's two mentoring programs—the *Governor's Mentoring Partnership* and the *Academic Volunteer and Mentor Service Program*, both appear to be a logical fit with the new California Service Corps. However, I don't believe that the Academic Volunteer and Mentor Service Program is currently being funded.
- State-sponsored older adult service programs: In terms of older adult service, there needs to be some clarification regarding this recommendation. The California Department of Education's *Intergenerational Program* is not part of Senior Corps. It is (or was) a relatively small grant program that funded 17 or 18 local K-12 school programs to engage older adult volunteers in service to their students. Although I believe that this program is no longer funded at the state level, it was a wonderful program and would be a good fit with the California Service Corps.

Additionally, in the past there has been state support for two of the federal Senior Corps programs—*Senior Companion Program (SCP)* and *Foster Grandparents Program (FGP)*—through funding from the California Department of Aging to local aging agencies. Again, I believe that this funding has either been significantly reduced or is at present very uncertain. However, these programs would also be a good fit with the California Service Corps.

If these state funding programs were transferred to the California Service Corps, it would be important to maintain close working relationships both at the state level (with the Departments of Education and Aging) and at the local level (with the networks and programs that implement them).

Additionally, beyond these specific programs for older adult service and volunteerism, there is a tremendous opportunity for mobilizing many more older adults to serve the State's needs. A recent Independent Sector study⁵ stated that the "Baby Boom generation represents the largest untapped pool of potential volunteers for the nonprofit community in recent history. As Baby Boomers begin to approach retirement age, nonprofit organizations will be faced with unprecedented opportunities and challenges to engage this population." The California Service Corps could provide leadership and foster innovation to help communities engage this growing human resource in volunteering and community service.

- California Conservation Corps (CCC): Despite its legacy and solid track record in building the character and skills of California's young adults and accomplishing public service work, CCC has experienced significant financial and programmatic cuts during the past several years. Transferring it to the California Service Corps would more closely align the CCC with its service mission and with the disaster planning and response activities of the Citizen Corps; however, it would take it away from its roots with natural resource management agencies. I believe that this is an acceptable tradeoff and that the transfer provides the best long-term potential for restructuring and strengthening the California Conservation Corps and for better connecting its functions with the network of independent community conservation corps that operate throughout the state. With the transfer, the CCC would be seen and operated as an important piece of California's overall service and volunteer strategy. However, if this transfer occurs, steps should be taken to maintain financial and operational support from natural resource agencies (e.g., parks, forestry, conservation, transportation, etc.).

(Related thoughts follow in Recommendation ETV31 Expand the Scope of the California Conservation Corps.)

- California Arts Council: I do not have adequate knowledge of the California Arts Council to comment on this recommendation, but suggest a careful assessment of this transfer to ensure that it is consistent with purpose and programs of California Service Corps.

C. Create philanthropic liaison and expanded public outreach activities.

(See next response to Recommendation ETV30 Remove Barriers that Impede the Use of Donated Funds)

3. Remove Barriers that Impede the Use of Donated Funds (ETV30)

While I support the recommendations to encourage philanthropic support for appropriate state activities and to simplify the state's ability to receive and use donated funds, I don't have the in-depth knowledge or understanding of this issue to comment on the specific recommendations.

4. Expand the Scope of the California Conservation Corps (ETV31)

I support the CPR's view that there the California Conservation Corps is currently at risk and that there needs to be a careful examination of its structure, operations and costs. Additional flexibility and authority could result in the generation of new funding sources. However, I believe the feasibility of ensuring CCC's sustainability through an entrepreneurial focus should be carefully assessed.

California currently has 11 independent community conservation corps that operate primarily in urban centers throughout the state. Developed over the past twenty years, these

independent corps have secured diverse funding from local and state sources. Their “entrepreneurial” approach and track record provides many lessons for the California Conservation Corps. They have demonstrated that it can be done, primarily in urban areas where they have been able to tap into local leadership and resources. However, much of CCC is based in rural areas and undertakes public service work (e.g., disaster preparedness and response) that is costly and may not have alternative funding sources. Additionally, it would not be desirable to put CCC in a competitive position with the existing community conservation corps.

I recommend that California’s long-standing commitment to conservation corps be continued. The corps – both the CCC and the local conservation corps – should remain part of a vital network that develops California’s young people through public service work. CCC also serves as an important disaster preparedness and response resource. However, CCC is at a critical juncture as it has been faced with dwindling resources and significant programmatic cuts; a process should be set up to review and re-think its operation and scope and to clearly articulate its future role in:

- Disaster preparedness and response
- Conservation work
- Other community service
- Youth development – for the young adult corpsmembers
- Broader service and volunteerism, particularly in volunteer generation and/or coordination
- Relationship to the community conservation corps, and how they meet state and local needs in a coordinated, not competitive manner

5. Create a Pilot Volunteer Leave Program for State Employees (ETV32)

I support the recommendation to create a pilot program to encourage state employees to volunteer by providing incentives. However, I believe that the specific proposal needs further study, particularly the idea of a volunteer leave system that would result in deferred payment for time spent volunteering.

6. Require Community Service of Public College and University Students (ETV33)

During the past several years, California’s public institutions of higher education have bolstered their programs to engage students in community service and service-learning, although the specific approaches vary from system to system and among campuses. In general, I support the idea of public college and university students being encouraged to participate in community service or service-learning activities. However, I recommend that there be further study of the ramifications of mandatory service – both to campuses (e.g., faculty, classes, and students) and to community institutions (e.g., community-based organizations, schools and other public agencies that would provide community service opportunities) in order to fully understand the feasibility and costs.

¹ Public/Private Ventures (Joseph P. Tierney and Jean Baldwin Grossman, with Nancy Resch). 2000. **Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters (Re-issue of 1995 Study)**. Philadelphia. http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/111_publication.pdf

² Public/Private Ventures (Jean Baldwin Grossman and Kathryn Furano). 2002. **Making the Most of Volunteers**. Philadelphia. http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/152_publication.pdf

³ Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service. 2003. **The Cost of a Volunteer: What it Takes to Provide a Quality Volunteer Experience**. Berkeley, CA. <http://www.pacefunders.org/publications/volunteering/volunteer.html>

⁴ Urban Institute. 2004. **Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report**. Washington, DC. <http://www.urban.org/template.cfm?Template=/TaggedContent/ViewPublication.cfm&PublicationID=8794&NavMenuID=95>

⁵ Independent Sector and AARP. 2003. **Experience at Work: Volunteering and Giving Among Americans 50 and Over**. Washington, DC. <http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/experience.html>